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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 46 (2012) 5919 – 5923

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

WCES 2012

Do you have a creative class? A yardstick to assess creativity level of EFL classrooms

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Abstract

Creativity is creating clear and singular visions for the future in the mind of people. These visions act as incentive in order for the people to enhance their thinking process and hence stimulate their creativity. Good teachers can encourage their students' creativity. Among recent works on creativity and creative thinking, one profound study is the influential book, *The Research for Satori and Creativity* written by E. Paul Torrence. This research is underpinned mostly by this book. This study explores the extent to which whether different EFL classrooms at Kashan university are creative or not. Five teachers were selected randomly. An observational checklist was used based on intrinsic attitudes of E. Paul Torrence he had gathered in his book after twenty years of study on creativity. Two observers were selected beforehand. Each class was observed twice by each of these observers. Two observers were selected to increase the research credibility. We have adopted Cronbach's alpha consistency analysis to verify whether or not the observation checklist possesses good reliability. The data from two raters gathered to be analyzed. The results of two raters were correlated. This checklist was implemented as a yardstick to see the level of creativity in each class. In the result we can see that rigid approaches which stifled creativity in EFL classrooms were easily spotted. Then in conclusion as a result of these findings, we offered some recommendations to the teachers of each class in order to enhance creativity.

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Keywords: Creativity, creative thinking, thinking process, observation;

1. Introduction

Creativity is one of the most fundamental key elements of having a good class. According to E. Paul (1979) creativity is making some pictures and visions of future in the mind of people of the society. He also puts it that these pictures would be a very strong incentive in order for the people to reach the highest level of thinking and creativity. It is obvious that both of the creativity and thinking processes are mutually complementary and never do they conflict. It means to boost our deep thinking processes we have to improve our creativity and vice versa. If creative thinking can be analyzed according to an intellect model, then ordinary people in everyday life, also, should be used as subjects of study (Karakelle, 2009). Karakelle (2009) in his study says that flexible and fluent thinking skills, two important elements in diverge thinking, can be enhanced through drama process. Because, positive emotions support divergent patterns of thinking, it can be concluded that experiencing positive emotions will increase creativity and support a creative mindset over a lifetime (Tan, A. G., Majid, D, 2011). In this study another

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wider dimension of creativity has been provided and teachers, pupils, and classrooms characteristics have been investigated. Now, we can infer that creativity is an absolutely vast area of study and no one can cover it all in a single study. So, it worth telling that in this study, pathological issues related to creativity in EFL classrooms are observed and fully analyzed. To have a better understanding of this research, reading the book by E. Paul Torrance named, *The Research on Satori and Creativity* is recommended. The main assumptions, queries, observation checklist, methods and other things have been raised from this book. A good extensive article review also has been done to help bridging the gaps of this research. In the study done by Ritter, Polnick, Fink II and Oescher (2010), one of the main aspects of having a creative class has been investigated. They are of the opinion that, leadership of the classroom is one of the important criteria of a creative class. In this respect, the teacher is at the center of attention. Also, in the checklist we will see that most of the items that should be observed in class are related to the teacher and his/her styles and strategies of teaching, leading and behaving. To mention the matter and issues related to creativity in EFL classrooms chronologically, next research is about psychological environment of the classroom and its effects on learning and teaching. Sadeghi (2010) has done a case study and focused on subscales of classroom psychological environment such as involvement, affiliation, teacher support, task orientation, competition, order & organization, rule clarity, teacher control and innovation. Each of these subscales has been elucidated completely to elicit their effects on learning. Appeasing classroom environment leads to the emergence of unusual thinking and ideas which are two important building blocks of a creative classroom. Teachers can offer different activities for students, create secure environment, and interact with students as a more knowledgeable person to empower students' creativity and act as mediators (Rahimi, Najafi, 0000). The knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors that teachers possess and their reflections affect first their students and then school administration, students' parents and the school environment (Kaya and Donmez, 2009). In their study, Kaya and Donmez (2009) discuss Constructivist Learning Approach and its position in classroom management. Constructivism is a learning approach where the students construct their own knowledge and mental models as a result of their own experiences and thinking by means of interacting with their environment (Gagnon, et al, 2006). It is completely obvious that the main concentration is on students and learners. Another main dimension in having a creative EFL classroom is learners' position in class. In this regard learners' intrinsic and extrinsic activities are important to investigate. Their mental and physical processes are very important to manage a creative class. Karakelle (2009) sheds light on the confluence of flexible thinking and fluent thinking. Karakelle is on the side of drama process and probes the effects of using drama on creative thinking. Throughout the debates about creativity, creative thinking attracts sustained researchers attention. Drama processes in the classroom hand in hand with fluent thinking demonstrate a creative atmosphere. Some of the necessary criteria for a creative class were manifested up to now. These were: framework of a creative EFL classroom, classroom leadership, and psychological environment of the classroom, constructivist learning approach and drama process. Creative writing strategies of young children have been explored by Chen and Zhou (2010). This study explores how Chinese children, as active learners and inventive thinkers, could develop their writing skills from simple drawing and scribbling to emergent writing skills, commanding the Chinese writing system finally (Sin Chen, Jing Zhou, 2010). Writing and composing has strong impression on creativity and creative thinking. Creativity is integrally related to contextual practices in classroom. To foster creativity, it is good to try the instruction which is used for observation in this study.

2. Method

2.1. Research questions

Mentioning and debating the objectives of this study would be feasible through evaluating the main research question and its pertinent fundamental questions. The main research question is:

What necessary criteria should be observed to have a creative EFL classroom?

In order to explain and fully elaborate this question some other minor questions should be included and explored profoundly. Some of these questions are:

What are the main criteria of a creative EFL teacher?

What are the main criteria of a creative EFL learner?

What are the main criteria of evaluating teachers and students?

How these evaluations are representative?

Is this a generalizable study or a context based study?

It is obvious that to easily reach the main research question we are supposed to discuss the minor questions meticulously.

2.2. Participants

10 classes with different numbers of students were observed. The classes are preferably the classes of teaching skills such as writing, reading, speaking and listening. Doing this study is feasible with intact classes, because randomization is contrary to the expectations. But the teachers were selected randomly. The teachers are unknown to the observers. One of the observers was the researcher himself who was supposed to observe and complete the checklist impartially.

2.3. Instrument

As this study is a kind of observational study there was not so much material in use. This is the nature of an observational study. All was needed was a checklist or questionnaire and all the happenings were unexpected and uncontrolled. It means the materials that might be used depend on the class and the context that the researcher wants to observe. A checklist was needed to criticize the process of teaching in EFL classrooms. The main book named *The Research for Satori and Creativity* is our major source of making the only instrument of this study. The checklist was derived from this book and it is used to gather the observational data from classes. This checklist summarizes most of the absolutely essential criteria for a creative class. The checklist itself has also some inner subscales. All of these subscales can evaluate related dimensions of a creative class. Some of them are status of the creativity in the eyes of the students, teachers, and psychological preferences in a creative class, emotional matters in class and etc. This checklist was derived, piloted and validated. Cronbach's alpha consistency analysis was adopted to verify whether or not the observation checklist possesses reliability and internal consistency. Having a coefficient value of .85 indicates that the observation checklist developed in this study possesses good internal consistency reliability. And also the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). It suffices to be sure about the internal consistency of the checklist.

Table 1. Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.858	.863	50

2.4. Data collection

The checklist which has been developed based on E. Paul Torrance book and introduced in previous section is at the center of attention in data collection. The researcher together with another observer shouldered the responsibility of data collection. The researcher and the observer observed the classes one by one and completed the checklist. Each class was observed twice by each observer to enhance inter-rater reliability. It is absolutely necessary for the researcher to be very careful about everything that happens in the class. Observers should also be totally dominant on the checklist; because, the activities that happen in an EFL classroom are not predictable and they are not based on hierarchical order of our checklist. First item of the checklist may happen at the end of the class or the last item may be at first or even may never happens. After completing the checklist, some questions should also be asked from teachers and students of the class. These questions are related to the items of the checklist that are not seen in the class in one session. The purpose of these questions is to ascertain whether other uncompleted items happened

before or they may happen in the next sessions of the class. If some of the items of checklist are not observed in the very class in which you are present, you cannot surely conclude that this class lacks this or these items. Learners may simply not produce a particular language structure, lexical item or speech act at all (Nunnan, M. Bailey p. 321). So, it is wrong to conclude that the supposed item is not present in the class.

3. Results

The Spearman–Brown Formula was used to measure inter-rater reliability ($\alpha=.89$, $p\leq 0.05$) between the two observers. When all the classes were observed completely and in other words when all the observation checklists were completed carefully, it was time to analyse them. The frequency of numbers given to each item was gathered first. Then, the results were put on a continuum. The continuum varies from 0 to 200. This continuum shows the least and the most creative classroom. To analyse the data we divide the continuum into six parts: not creative ($f\leq 30$), not very creative ($30\leq f\leq 60$), partly creative ($60\leq f\leq 90$), creative ($90\leq f\leq 120$), very creative ($120\leq f\leq 160$) and most creative ($160\leq f$). In this case, we have a more tangible definition of the classes. It means we have a diagram for each class like the one below. Creativity level of each class then attained. Referring to each item of the checklist for each class the defective areas proved and declared to the teachers of each class; it means those that hinder the process of having a creative atmosphere.

4. Discussion

Having a creative class is every body's purpose. So, to have a more creative class, it is recommended that we omit the malfunctions and those rigid approaches and attitudes that hinder creativity. Researcher evaluates the class and pinpoints the malfunctioning areas. Announcing these malfunctions to the teachers and students of the class can help them to have a more creative class. It is up to the teachers first and then to the students to do their best in the way of having a creative class. They should do their best to ameliorate and facilitate communication and cooperation to establish a creative class. Problems are our opportunities to change the world, nothing less than that (Weston, 2007, 5). Teachers and students should take all the problems into consideration. Even both the teachers and students should delve into the marginal issues and don't consider them commonplace. As the checklist shows the great burden is on the teachers' shoulder; because, he/she as an instructor or like a movie director is supposed to pave the way to have a creative classroom and make the students motivated. L2 intrinsic motivation involves enjoyment of learning a second or foreign language for its own sake without any external coercion or pressure (Wu, X, 2003). Recent trends towards creativity and creative mind wants students and teachers to be critical about the posed topics in and out of the classroom. Critical thinking nowadays is of utmost importance. It worth mentioning that going from surface to deep structure of the language can foster creativity. Criticality in classroom can challenge each and every student. When challenged, students want to remove the obstacles. This leads students in a way that whether they want or not, they need to be creative to find the best and comprehensive way in a very short time to survive and protect their endangered attitudes. This model can assist students and teachers in their critical and creative thinking.

5. Acknowledgments

My special thanks to the anonymous observer who helped me so much with his thoughtful, influential and committed observations and feedbacks.

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